Liang Qichao, Japan and the use of military songs in the forging of a new people

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Introduction

This paper is part of a larger project that examines the use of song in the forging of a new national citizenry in late Qing China. Focusing on the linkage between the rise of nationalism and the emergence of *xuetang yuege* (modern school songs), the project aims to provide a study of how, when, where, and why Chinese reformers, broadly defined, and revolutionaries became active advocates of the school songs in the last two decades of the Qing. In addition to discussing music in the service of the nation, the project also examines Japan's role in China's struggles over issues such as modernity, iconoclasm, and social and political transformation.

In the first years of the 20th century, the prominent reformer Liang Qichao (1873-1929), inspired by his experiences in Japan, wrote a number of articles exalting the values of militarism. Rather than condemning the Japanese for their recent aggression against China, he expressed his admiration for their cult of militarism. In praising the warrior virtues of loyalty, patriotism, discipline, bravery, and physical strength, he virtually said goodbye to an old world of faith in pacifism. To forge a "new people", he argued, a militant spirit needed to be rekindled first in the Chinese populace. To achieve this end, he suggested military songs, along with poetry, fiction, drama and other arts should be used. Based on his writings published in the popular fortnightly, *Renewing the People* (*Xinmin congbao*), published between 1902 and 1905, this paper first looks at Liang's ideas of music as a tool to help shape public attitudes and behaviour in the process of making a "new people". It then looks at the type of military songs Liang promoted. Particular attention is paid to his promotion of the poet Huang Zunxian's military songs written at a time when China's governing and intellectual elites were becoming increasingly obsessed with 'military virtues'. By comparing Liang's views on music before and after his exile in Japan, the paper argues that Liang's promotion of military-style patriotic songs marked a major shift in his thinking. Music, as far as Liang was concerned, was to take on a role that was much more utilitarian and much broader in social and political significance. This utilitarian intent in turn was conditioned by

his times in Japan and his close association with future military commanders like Cai E (1882-1916). It was also consistent with his utilitarian view of literature and the arts as a whole.

In focusing on Liang's preoccupation with military songs, the purpose of this paper is not to reduce the complexity of Chinese experience with music and militarism; but rather to bring out the most radical and pervasive voice within the cacophony of demands on music. By investigating why, when, where, and how a prominent reformer like Liang became an active advocate of this new form of Western music, the paper seeks to explain how ideas about the uses of music at the turn of the 20th century laid the foundation for the future political instrumentalisation of music —a key feature that characterised much of both the Chinese Communists' and Nationalists' attitudes toward the arts—, and helped to account for the current "red song" campaign.

Liang Qichao and the Promotion of Military-Style Patriotic Songs

Although militarist ideas began to flourish in China in the late 19th century as a result of European influences, calls for military education did not become widespread until the turn of the 20th century when a number of radical Chinese students in Japan began to idealise the military calling above other pursuits and write about the necessity of training a martial-spirited citizenry. Along with calls for martial values and 'military national education'[1] came the appeal for the use of military songs and martial music as a tool of nation-building.

Among leading proponents of military songs, Liang Qichao stood out as the most indefatigable. 'If we want to transform the character of our people,' he wrote in 1903, 'the teaching of poetry and music then must be considered as one of the most important means.'[2] In 1904, he reiterated his conviction by saying: 'If we are to engage ourselves in education, the subject of singing must be part of the school curriculum'[3] Apart from promoting military songs written by his friends such as Huang Zunxian, Yang Du, Tan Sitong and others, he also wrote a number of songs himself. So important was Liang's role in promoting military songs in China that when naming the representatives of the school-song movement, Zhang Jingwei,

[1] Bai Li, "Junguomin zhi jiaoyu", *Xinmin congbao*, 22 (December 1902): 33-52.
[2] Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi shihua* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1959), p. 58.
[3] Ibid., p. 77.

a prominent historian of 20th century Chinese music, had no hesitation in putting Liang's name on top of the list.[4]

Liang's enthusiasm for military marches was clearly a reflection of his desire to combat the Chinese pacifist tendency. But it is worth noting that up to the time of the Hundred Days of Reform in 1898, Liang, like his mentor Kang Youwei, took a broad social and cultural approach to music, emphasising its importance in moral, ethical, intellectual, and physical education.[5] But, as Liang became more nationalistic in his political thinking after fleeing to Japan in late 1898, his attitude toward music also underwent a kind of transformation. By the beginnings of the 20th century, the nation in Liang's view, although never was his sole value, had become the highest good.[6] Instead of focusing on the transformative effect of music in moral and ethical cultivation, he became convinced of the efficacy of songs in the forging of a new citizenry in China. With a zest unmatched by any others of his generation, he argued passionately for the effectiveness of patriotic songs as an instrument of nationalist agitation. In fact, the promotion of military songs became such a dominant theme in his writings at this time that most of his references to music published in the *Xinmin congbao* can even be categorised as a blatant form of nationalist propaganda.

Liang's utalitarian approach to music is nowhere more evident than his wholehearted endorsement of the marching songs written by his friend Huang Zunxian. In 1902 when he read Huang's 'Four Marching Songs,' he 'was deliriously happy.' 'To sum up in one sentence, I must say that anyone who can read these poems without dancing is not a real man!'[7]

Liang had always admired Huang's effort to use his literary talent to promote Chinese nationalism. But it is very telling that, of the voluminous literary works Huang produced, Liang would find such motivational inspiration in the military marches.

As an architect of the 1898 Reforms and experienced diplomat, Huang Zunxian composed these marches for the express purpose of stirring up a martial spirit and patriotic sentiment among Chinese soldiers and ordinary citizens. In addition to the overwhelming tenor of ardent nationalism, of devotion to the cause of strengthening China, most of Huang's

[4] Zhang Jingwei, "Lun xuetang yuege" in *Zhongguo yishu yanjiuyuan shoujie yanjiusheng shuoshi lunwenji* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1987), pp. 130-33.
[5] Hong-yu Gong, "Missionaries, Reformers and the Beginnings of Western Music in Late Imperial China (1839-1911)" (Ph.D. diss., Auckland University, 2006), pp. 231-35.
[6] Hao Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and the Intellectual Transition in China, 1890-1907* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 155-58.
[7] Liang, *Yinbingshi shihua*, pp. 42-43, translated and cited in J. D. Schmidt, *Within the Human Realm: The Poetry of Huang Zunxian, 1848-1905* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 56.

marching songs had refrains with such soul-stirring words as 'Fight! Fight! Fight!', 'Win! Win! Win!', 'Forward! Forward! Forward!' or 'Brave! Brave! Brave!' These were clearly designed to awaken the martial spirit among the Chinese soldiers. These songs appealed to Liang not because of their refined aesthetic sense or superb literary merits, but due to their combative, belligerent tone and passion-stirring effects. In other words, in these songs Liang discovered an ideal form that could be deployed to achieve his pressing goal of setting the Chinese masses on a march toward creating a strong China.

It came as no surprise that Liang should be so enthusiastic about promoting Western-style marching songs in his effort to rejuvenate the nation. As a musical form, the revival of the march in the West was closely linked to the emergence of nationalism, patriotism, and militarism.[8] John Philip Sousa, composer of the official march of the United States of America, *The Stars and Stripes Forever*, explained the appeal of marching music as follows:

> Like the beat of an African war drum, the march speaks to a fundamental rhythm in the human organisation and is answered. A march stimulates every centre of vitality, wakens the imagination and spurs patriotic impulses which may have been dormant for years. I can speak with confidence because I have seen men profoundly moved by a few measures of a really inspired march.[9]

According to Xia Xiaohong, both Huang Zunxian's and Liang's interest in military songs was inspired by an essay entitled 'On the Martial Citizen', written by Liang's student and the future military commander, Cai E.[10] Serialised in Liang's *Xinmin congbao*, Cai, then a student of the Imperial Japanese Army Academy, blamed China's weak position in the world on her lack of a martial spirit. Citing Japan's success in using militaristic songs to instil such a spirit in her people, he argued that if China were to regain the martial spirit it had lost, it would have to follow the Japanese example and use music as a means to carry out military and patriotic education.[11]

Liang's passion for military songs can be seen as a natural outgrowth of his search for a vehicle for great nationalistic appeal. For years he had been concerned with the lack of

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[8] Krystyn R. Moon, "'There is no Yellow in the Red, White, and Blue': The Creation of Anti-Japanese Music during World War II", *Pacific Historical Review* 72. 3 (2003): 346-47.
[9] Cited in Moon, p. 347.
[10] Xiao Xiaohong, "Junge", *Dushu* 6 (2000): 85.
[11] Fen Hesheng [Cai E], "Jun guomin pian", reprinted in Zeng Yeying ed., *Cai Songpo ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chuban she, 1984), pp. 25-6.

fighting spirit among the Chinese people. Like Cai E, he pointed the finger at Chinese music for being one of the factors that contributed to this passivity. 'There are many reasons for the lack of a martial spirit among the Chinese, but the gentleness of Chinese music is certainly one', he asserted.[12] In his diagnosis, the lack of military songs was 'closely related to the decline in our national fortunes.'[13] Liang discovered in military marches a motivational tool whereby he could counter the national psyche of passivity and cowardice.[14]

Liang's belief in the efficacy of militaristic music in ultimately contributing to the building of the nation is also evident in his citing of the following ancient legend in support of his argument:

> Formerly, when the Spartans were besieged and begged assistance from Athens, the Athenians responded by sending a one-eyed, lame schoolteacher, which greatly puzzled the Spartans. But just before a battle, this teacher composed military songs, which, sung by the Spartans, increased their valour a hundredfold, enabling them to win a victory. How deeply music is able to move men![15]

Liang's preoccupation with the instrumentality of military songs in creating a 'new citizenry' led him to repeatedly urge Chinese writers and musicians to appropriate Western, primarily European and American, march-type melodies and adapt them to Chinese settings. He even formulated certain critical views about the problems in the creation of a new Chinese music.[16] Rather than advocating a wholesale importation of Western music, he counselled Chinese songwriters and musicians to make good use of indigenous musical forms such as ritual and ceremonial music (*yayue*), regional operas (*ju*) and popular music (*suyue*) while keeping an open eye on musical developments in the West. As far as he was concerned, the future national music of China would have to be both modern and Chinese.[17] This formula of combining indigenous and Western musical elements is not without historical significance. It continues to dominate the thinking of Chinese musicians even to this day.

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[12] Liang, *Yinbingshi shihua*, p. 42, trans, and cited in Schmidt, *Within the Human Realm*, p. 56.
[13] Liang, *Yinbingshi shihua*, pp. 42-43, trans, Schmidt, *Within the Human Realm*, p. 56.
[14] Liang, *Yinbingshi shihua*, pp. 14-15, 66-69.
[15] Liang, *Yinbingshi shihua*, p. 42, translated and cited in Schmidt, *Within the Human Realm*, p. 56.
[16] Da Wei, "Liang Qichao, Zeng Zhimin dui jindai yinyue wenhua de gongxian" *Renmin yinyue* 2 (1983): 39-40.
[17] Liang, *Yinbingshi shihua*, p. 62. Cf, Da Wei, p. 40.

As a man of action, Liang Qichao was by no means satisfied with playing the role of a mere promoter. He not only took the trouble of translating foreign anthems into Chinese[18] but also composed patriotic songs himself. Fearing the nationalist messages conveyed in these songs were lost, Liang took pains to explicate the rationale for writing them and reiterated again and again his hope that one day these songs, along with his novels and poems, would help awaken a national consciousness among the Chinese people.[19] In explicating his political motives and phrasing his arguments in terms of the national interest, Liang time and again made plain his nationalist impulses.

Conclusion

How did music in general and songs in particular take on such a vital role in the forging of a new citizenry? The observations offered suggest that the Chinese interest in military songs had little to do with the artistic beauty of music *per se*. From the very beginning, the Chinese interest was conditioned by its utilitarian motives. Driven by a desire to use songs to serve the nationalist cause, the agitation to introduce this genre in China was rooted in larger concerns of creating and defining nationhood.

The above discussion has also touched Japan's role in China's search for nationhood. In their search for an effective tool to reinvigorate the national spirit, Chinese reformers and revolutionaries turned to Japan, rather than the West, for inspiration. By serving as 'China's model and active partner every step of the way',[20] Japan not only alerted the Chinese to the efficacy of music as a vehicle of political and social engineering but also showed them how to use singing to awaken a national consciousness among the masses.

To be sure, there is nothing new about music being used to serve social, political and ideological goals. Music as a means of edification has occupied an important place in Chinese cultural life from the earliest recorded times.[21] Yet, compared to earlier Chinese diplomats, education officials, and visitors to Japan, Liang Qichao was more explicit in his utilitarian promotion of music in China. This is because his efforts were more directly tied to China's nationalist struggle of the early 20th century. His emphasis on the social and political

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[18] Da Wei, p. 40.
[19] Liang Qichao, *Xin Luoma chuanqi*, cited in Da Wei, p. 39.
[20] Douglas R. Reynolds, *China, 1898-1912: The Xinzheng Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 5.
[21] Chinese classics abound in references to music and almost all of the major thinkers of early China remarked on the significance of music. See Walter Kaufmann, *Musical References in the Chinese Classics* (Detroit: Information Coordinators, 1976).

functions of music not only struck a harmonious chord with the reformers at the time but also fitted in well with later and successive regimes' view of music as public utility.